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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 000450

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: COUNTRY CLEARANCE REQUEST FOR REGIONAL REFUGEE
COORDINATOR TRAVEL TO VENEZUELA FEBRUARY 13-19

REF: HOEY-HIDEA EMAILS

1. The Embassy grants country clearance for Regional Refugee Coordinator Colleen Hoey's visit to Venezuela from February 13-19, 2005 for consultations with Embassy Caracas UNHCR, CARITAS, Jesuit Refugee Service, and Government of Venezuela officials in charge of refugee matters.

Embassy point of contact will be Carolina Hidea.
Address: Embassy of the United States, Calle F con Calle Suapure, Colinas de Valle Arriba, Caracas, Venezuela. Telephone numbers: Office 58-212-907-8493. Cellphone: 58-414-261-9394

Embassy after-hours direct line for Marine security guard is 58-212-907-8400.

LODGING

Embassy has made reservations for RefCoord at the Marriott Hotel in Caracas for February 13-15. Telephone number: 58-212-957-2222 Fax number: 58-212-957-1111. Reservation information for border destinations will be sent via email.

PASSPORT REQUIREMENTS

All passengers who enter Venezuela on official travel (including third country nationals) require a visa. Travelers should not use tourist passports. DOD personnel participating in GOV-approved deployments and exercises, and arriving with military orders, are exempt from the visa requirement.

Venezuelan immigration requires citizens of the United States and certain other countries to have at least six months validity remaining on their passports to enter Venezuela. While this law has not been uniformly enforced, some U.S. citizens have been denied entry. Ensure your passport has at least six months validity from the date of arrival to Venezuela.

COMPUTER POLICIES

State Department TDY Visitors requiring OpenNet-Plus Systems access during their stay should inform the control officer prior to their arrival. Visitors will be required to attend a Systems Security briefing and complete a Network Access Request Form.

Personnel who intend to bring U.S. Government portable microcomputers (laptops) for use in CAA or non-CAA areas must notify RSO in advance. Personal Electronic Devices (PED), Personal Digital Assistants (PDA) e.g. 'Palm Pilots', MP-3 players, etc. are NOT authorized in CAA spaces and are not authorized connectivity within OpenNet unclassified or classified networks, or stand-alone classified PCs.

2. The following pertains to transportation and departures, exchange rate, security, medical considerations, weather, and press. For additional information, consult the Consular Information Sheet for Venezuela, which can be found on the web at:
<http://travel.state.gov/venezuela.html>

CURRENCY / EXCHANGE RATE

The exchange rate is USD 1 = 1920 Bolivares (Bs).

Visitors should bring a major credit card. Travelers checks are not recommended as they are honored in only a few locations. It is possible to exchange cash at major hotel chains in Caracas (personal checks are not accepted) and at the Embassy cashier.

TRANSPORTATION

There have been a number of armed robbery incidents involving persons who have taken unlicensed "taxis" from Maiquetia Airport. (Please read the Security section carefully.)

The Embassy will provide transportation. To meet the driver, proceed to the "Customer Service" kiosk, directly across from the customs exit.

Italcambio is the travel contractor for the Embassy. If necessary, ask to use a telephone at any Italcambio booth to call the Embassy.

Departure Expenses

An airport user fee of Bs. 73,500 (approx. \$39) is levied at the airport upon departure for holders of official and diplomatic passports. Holders of tourist passports must pay the user fee plus an exit tax, for a total of Bs. 102,900 (approximately \$54). Payment of both must be made in Bolivares.

SECURITY

At the Airport. Many drivers--often wearing badges identifying them as "taxi officials"--have been known to rob unwary travelers. If someone asks if you are with the American Embassy: 1) do not give your name, 2) ask for the name of the person he is seeking and identification. Do not go with the person if he cannot give you the information you request. Call the Embassy.

Airport parking lot robberies are increasing. The Embassy advises all persons to stay away from the parking lots, except for the diplomatic lot located close to the terminal.

General Crime. There is a significant level of common street crime in certain areas of Caracas and other major cities in Venezuela. These crimes are of the pick pocketing, purse-snatching variety and visitors are advised to be aware of their surroundings and to be particularly alert in crowded areas. Jewelry items, particularly gold-colored, attract the attention of thieves and should be left in a safe place along with other valuables.

If you are confronted in a robbery situation, the RSO suggests that you comply with the criminals' demands. Do not attempt to run or antagonize the perpetrator. Most criminals only seek cash or jewelry items; many will only resort to violence if you resist their demands.

To avoid being the victim of a crime, visitors should remain alert to their surroundings and maintain constant control of purses, backpacks, briefcases and luggage.

Taxis within the city are plentiful and relatively safe. However, the Embassy recommends the use of hotel and radio dispatched taxis and group travel whenever possible, especially after dark. Travelers should carry only the minimum cash needed and, if possible, no credit cards when venturing outside of the hotel.

Civil Disturbances. Travelers to Venezuela should be aware of the potential for violent demonstrations, especially in urban centers, and exercise appropriate caution by standing well clear of public protests, police lines and barricades.

CAR RENTAL

If you rent a car, you must authorize it with the proper authority at post.

MEDICAL

Venezuela recommends that all travelers be vaccinated prior to arrival. As Yellow Fever vaccine is difficult to obtain in Venezuela, do not count on the Embassy to provide a vaccination. In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requires a Yellow Fever vaccination certificate for travelers older than one year of age arriving from various countries. Information about vaccination requirements for travel to Venezuela may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Internet site at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>.

The water is considered contaminated. Drink only bottled water or carbonated soft drinks and avoid ice in drinks. Do not eat raw vegetables or fruits unless they have been disinfected, peeled or cooked. Wash your hands often with hot, soapy water.

Cases of dengue fever and malaria are reported throughout Venezuela each year. Travelers planning to spend time outdoors should bring insect repellent; wear

long trousers; and avoid wet areas. Symptoms include fever, headaches, diarrhea and general malaise. While rarely fatal, you should see a doctor if you experience these symptoms.

The Embassy does not make or guarantee payments to medical providers on behalf of non-U.S. Government employees. All individuals should bring clear evidence of medical insurance coverage. In case emergency evacuation is required, non-USG employees, USG Contract staff, and Locally Employed Staff from other posts must have adequate medical and air ambulance insurance and must carry the contact information with them. Venezuelan hospitals and physicians do not accept insurance documents and may require payment in cash or by credit card.

WEATHER

Daytime temperatures in Caracas are usually between 75 and 85 degrees Fahrenheit. During the rainy season, roughly from April through November, afternoon rain showers are common. Evenings can be cool at any time of the year. Recommend travelers bring a sweater or light jacket for evening outings, and an umbrella, no matter the time of year.

Communications with the Press

Travelers are reminded that Public Affairs is responsible for handling press arrangements for both mission personnel and official visitors. Contact the Public Affairs Officer, Salome Hernandez, 975-6990 or the Press Attach, Brian Penn, 975-8118 after arrival if you believe you may have contact with the press while in Venezuela.